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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: BORDER INCIDENT UNDERSCORES LIMITATIONS

REF: A. ASTANA 3287

¶1. Summary: On the evening of December 10, four people attacked border guards at the Karasu checkpoint on the Kazakhstani-Kyrgyz border. As a result of the conflict, the border guards killed one person, police detained two suspects, and the others escaped. The conflict with the border guards was apparently initiated to distract them from an illegal border crossing. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

¶2. The international checkpoint Karasu is located in the Korday rayon of the Zhambylskaya oblast on the Kazakhstani-Kyrgyz border. It is located near the Chu River Bridge and is on the most direct route from Issyk-Kul in the Kyrgyz Republic to Almaty. Issyk-Kul is a major tourist destination for Kazakhstanis and many tourists cross at the Karasu checkpoint during summer months. The length of the Kazakhstani-Kyrgyz border is 1,205 km.

¶3. The Border Guard Service (BGS) has complained that the Kazakhstani-Kyrgyz border is not well equipped and is planning to begin providing additional equipment on the border in 2008. General-Major Talgat Yessetov, Commander of the Ontustik Regional Department, stated in a November interview that traffickers and organized criminal groups are actively smuggling drugs and other contraband over the border with Kyrgyzstan for transit through Kazakhstan. He also said that traffickers were willing to use increasingly aggressive means to cross the border. Yessetov said that last summer there were several attempts to cross the border using a column of a hundred cars forcing their way through checkpoints. He added that, whereas traffickers had been willing to attempt to intimidate border guards in the past, they were now willing to physically fight with the guards.

¶4. During his recent visit (reftel A), Deputy Head of the BGS General-Major Berkaliyev also discussed the problems on the southern borders and said that the borders with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were in the most dire need of additional equipment and assistance.

LATEST INCIDENT

¶5. On December 10, one person was killed and two detained when a group attacked the border post at Karasu. According to official statements from the Ontustik Regional Department reported in the local press, two people arrived in a vehicle from the village of Karasu in Kazakhstan, stopped at the checkpoint, and were joined by two others, who had been hiding near the checkpoint. The two border guards on duty were attacked and wounded one of assailants. The attackers were unarmed and attempted to disarm the border guards. During the attack, a jeep passed through a shallow part of the Chu

River into Kazakhstan. As soon as the jeep crossed the border, the three assailants grabbed their wounded colleague and escaped towards the village of Korday. The authorities later received a report that a wounded Kazakhstani died in the central hospital in Korday.

¶16. Because the BGS has limited jurisdiction, the case was transferred to the Korday Regional Office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). As a result of MVD's investigation, officers detained two Kazakhstanis suspected of being involved in the incident. No other suspects have been detained and the nationalities of the others involved in the incident have not been determined. Though the investigation is ongoing, the authorities suspect that the driver of the jeep was transporting drugs, but they have not excluded the possibility that other types of contraband or even persons were transported in the jeep.

COMMENT

¶17. This incident clearly highlights the continued weaknesses at the southern borders. In light of Kazakhstan's geographic position and the record opium harvest in Afghanistan, the BGS will face an increasingly serious threat of drug traffic. As the BGS responds to this threat and increases security on the border, the traffickers may be pushed to use bolder methods and take greater risks, as seen in this incident. The BGS will need to be aware of these risks and appropriately train their officers. The Embassy will continue to assist the GOK in securing its border and examine its assistance programs for opportunities to provide the necessary training and equipment. This issue will also be raised at the next international coordination meeting in January. End Comment.

ORDWAY